

[The Yale Study  
for CIA]

[247] Oct. 4

Public Papers of the Presidents

247 The President's News Conference of  
October 4, 1951

THE PRESIDENT. Please sit down.

I haven't been late for a long time, but I thought I would keep you waiting a little while.

[1.] I know what you are interested in. You are interested in censorship. And I don't believe in it. So just to keep you busy, I am going to read you a statement.

Q. Is that prepared for us?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes.

[Reading, not literally] "There has been considerable misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the Executive order issued on September 24, 1951, relating to the handling of information which has been classified, in order to protect the national security."

And right here I want to stop and tell you that Central Intelligence had Yale University make a survey, and that survey found—and they had no connection with the Government—that 95 percent of all our information was public property.

"This Executive order represented an honest effort to find the best approach to a problem that is important to the survival of the United States of America. I issued the order with great reluctance, and only when I was convinced, after lengthy consideration, that it was necessary to protect the United States against its potential enemies. I think my record in defending civil liberties in this country demonstrates that I have no desire to suppress freedom of speech, or freedom of the press.

"I would like for the public to understand what this order undertakes to do, and why it was necessary to issue it.

"In its simplest terms, the problem is what we should do to keep military and related secrets from falling into the hands of the enemies of the United States. I do not believe that anyone could seriously contend

that military secrets should be published in the newspapers, or that anyone has a right or a duty to see that military secrets are published. I believe that everyone, including Members of Congress and newspaper editors, should think twice before advocating a theory that would lead to that result.

"Whether it be treason or not, it does the United States just as much harm for military secrets to be made known to potential enemies through open publication, as it does for military secrets to be given to an enemy through the clandestine operations of spies."

There isn't any difference at all.

"On the other hand, I do not believe that protection of military secrets should be made a cloak or a cover for withholding from the people information about their Government which should be made known to them. I believe that everyone, including Government officials, should try to prevent this from happening.

"It is easy to agree on these two objectives, but it was difficult to establish the means for accomplishing both of them.

"In those agencies of the Government primarily concerned with national security matters, such as the Department of State and the Department of Defense, we have had for a number of years a system of classifying information to prevent its disclosure to unauthorized persons when it would be dangerous to the national security. This system has worked reasonably well, although it has not in all instances prevented the publication of information which aided our enemies against the United States, and in other cases it has been used to classify information which actually has no particular relationship to national security."

Those are the two things that we are faced with, how to prevent our military

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secrets from becoming the possessions of our enemies, and how to be sure that, in doing that, we don't cover up information that ought to be made public.

[Continuing reading] "In the present defense mobilization period, it has become necessary in an increasing number of cases to make military secrets available to executive agencies other than the military departments, in order that these other agencies might effectively perform their functions that are necessary in supporting the defense effort. It is also necessary for some of these civilian agencies—such as the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, for example—to originate and protect some information vital to our defense.

"It should be readily apparent that military secrets in the hands of these other agencies should be protected just as much as when they are in the hands of the military departments. It would also seem to be sensible to provide that different agencies take the same kind of precautions to protect this information. It would not make any sense to have a paper containing military secrets carefully locked up in a safe in the Pentagon, with a copy of the same paper left lying around on the desk of a lawyer in the Justice Department.

"Now, the purpose of this Executive order is to provide a commonsense answer to these problems. It is to provide that information affecting the national security shall continue to be protected when it gets out of the hands of the military departments and into the hands of other agencies. The purpose is to provide that these other agencies shall provide the same kind of protection that is provided in the military departments.

"Another purpose of the order—and it is a most important purpose—is to provide that information shall not be classified and withheld from the public on the ground that

it affects the national security, unless it is in fact actually necessary to protect such information in the interest of national security.

"In other words, one of the purposes of this Executive order is to correct abuses which may have grown up by use of overclassification of information in the name of national security.

"I think this Executive order represents a reasonable approach to a very difficult problem. I think it will work in the public interest, and I expect to watch it closely, to see that it is not used as an excuse for withholding information to which the public is entitled.

"It may well be that experience under the order will indicate that it should be changed. In that case, I will be glad to change it—and I will be glad to give consideration to reasonable suggestions for changes that are advanced in good faith.

"I would like to suggest to those who are seriously and honestly concerned about this matter, that they consider it objectively and with the interests of the United States uppermost in their minds. I would like to suggest that they consider how we can best accomplish objectives which all of us should be able to agree upon. I do not believe that the best solution can be reached by adopting an approach based on the theory that everyone has a right to know our military secrets and related information affecting the national security."<sup>1</sup>

Now, I am going to hand you this in mimeographed form, and I hope every one of you will take a good look at it, and that you will give it to your editors and your publishers. And remember that 95 percent of our secret information has been revealed by newspapers and slick magazines, and that is what I am trying to stop.

Q. Mr. President, can you give us some examples of what caused this order?

<sup>1</sup> See Items 233, 234, 248, 302.

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THE PRESIDENT. Yes. The most outstanding example was the publication in Fortune magazine of all the locations and the maps of our atomic energy plants. And then, in this very town—in every town in the country—were published air maps of Washington, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, and other of our great cities, with arrows pointing to the key points in those towns.

Q. I think that information was given out by the departments—

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I don't care who gave it out. The publishers had no business to use it, if they had the welfare of the United States at heart.

Q. I don't know if the military or atomic energy—

THE PRESIDENT. I don't care who gave it out. The publisher should be just as patriotic as I am, and I wouldn't give it out.

Q. The story was over the wire—

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I don't care about that—

Q. —attributed to a military agency—

THE PRESIDENT. Yes, and if the military agency gives you that, and an atomic bomb falls on you on account of that, at the right place, who is to blame?

Q. Well, my experience has been that the editors did not make up these maps—

THE PRESIDENT. They did, in Fortune magazine.

Q. I mean, the civil defense map—

THE PRESIDENT. Well, they were air pictures of the great cities. And it's terrible. I wish I had them of Russia and their manufacturing plants. I could use them.

Q. Mr. President, when was that Yale survey made, sir?

THE PRESIDENT. Oh, just a short time ago—just a short time ago.

Q. May I ask, Mr. President, right along the line of your effort to safeguard military

and security information, what safeguards are there that the security officer will not be overzealous? As I recall, the first action taken under your Executive order was the statement by the security officer of the OPS, who said that security information is anything which is embarrassing to OPS?

THE PRESIDENT. And he had the carpet pulled out from under him, if you remember!

Q. You are the one man to watch everything, except no one human being can watch everything.

THE PRESIDENT. No—that is correct—that is correct. And I hate censorship just as badly as you do, and I will protect you against that as far as I can. But the safety and welfare of the United States of America comes first with me.

Q. As a corollary question, there was a suggestion on Capitol Hill, I believe by Senator Benton—although I am not sure—that each department which has a security officer also have a man who fights for release of information?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I don't know about that. I don't know about that.

What is it, May? <sup>2</sup>

Q. Mr. President, have you weighed the importance of the free press in relation to military security—

THE PRESIDENT. Yes—

Q. —as both important to this country?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes, yes. A free press is just as important as the Bill of Rights, and that is what is contained in the Bill of Rights.

Q. Yes sir. But do you not think you are giving dangerous power to civilian agencies to say what shall be given to the people?

THE PRESIDENT. I am not so sure. We will have to wait and find out. If that is the case, why we will change it, as I said

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. May Craig of the Portland (Maine) Press Herald.

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right here—[indicating the statement].

Q. Do you not think that censorship is always abused to a degree?

THE PRESIDENT. I don't know. I have had no experience.

Q. I have, sir, and I find that it always is, even by the military.

THE PRESIDENT. Well, where is Elmer Davis?<sup>3</sup> He can tell us about that.

Mr. Davis: Is there any program giving training in uniform standards for the security officers?

THE PRESIDENT. I hope there will—I hope there will be.

Joseph H. Short (Secretary to the President): Mr. President, that was provided, sir. There is training in uniform standards by the ICIS, and ICIS is going to review all of these classifications.

Q. Didn't hear what Joe said, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT. He said that there was provided in the order a training program for these men, and for uniform standards, and that that training would be carefully supervised.

Q. Did I understand you to say, sir, that 95 percent of our secret information has been revealed?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes.

Q. Secret?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes. Ninety-five percent of all our information has been revealed in the press in one way or another.

Q. Mr. President, I think what's in Macon's<sup>4</sup> mind, you said, we got it: "Remember that 95 percent of our secret information has been revealed by newspapers and slick magazines, and that is what I am trying to stop." Is that correct—is that correct, sir?

<sup>3</sup> Elmer Davis of the American Broadcasting Company, former Director of the Office of War Information.

<sup>4</sup> Macon Reed, Jr., of the Transradio Press Service.

THE PRESIDENT. That's right. That's correct. That's the answer.

Q. Mr. President, on this question of the maps, I wonder if we could recapitulate that just a little? Do we understand correctly that in event that a newspaper or magazine gets some information from, say, the Defense Department, do you think, sir, that the primary responsibility on whether that is published is on the publisher and not on the originating agency?

THE PRESIDENT. There is no question about that, because they are very careful not to publish a lot of things that I say. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President, just a technical question. What maps are we having reference to here?

THE PRESIDENT. Air maps of the cities of the United States.

Q. Are you referring to any one in particular, or just some that have been published?

THE PRESIDENT. If you will look back through the magazines, you will find—or the daily papers—the News here in Washington published an air map of the city of Washington and pointed out the key places in it.

Q. Thank you very much.

THE PRESIDENT. That is what I am worried about now. I am not trying to suppress information. I am trying to prevent us from being wiped out.

Q. Mr. President, to get the record clear, those maps indicating the vital points in cities, weren't they issued by the Civil Defense Administration?

THE PRESIDENT. I don't know where they came from. I only know what I saw in the paper.

Q. Mr. President, I would like to clear up this 95 percent. You say secret information has been disclosed. You would not have had that 95 percent disclosed that has already been disclosed?

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THE PRESIDENT. No. There's a lot of it. I wouldn't disclose, but 95 percent of it has been made public.

Q. Well, I know that the Central Intelligence and the others say that 95 percent of their information comes from magazines.

THE PRESIDENT. That is correct.

Q. Yes.

THE PRESIDENT. That is absolutely correct.

Q. As I understood the statement, that—

THE PRESIDENT. Ninety-five percent of our secret information has been disclosed.

Q. I think we are talking about two different things.

THE PRESIDENT. Well, maybe—

Q. But is that—

THE PRESIDENT. The Post-Dispatch and I are usually talking about two different things, Pete.<sup>5</sup> [Laughter]

Q. Not on military affairs. Not on military affairs. But this 95 percent of our secret information which you want to keep secret has been disclosed?

THE PRESIDENT. That is the information I have from Central Intelligence.

Q. Well, Mr. President, who classified that 95 percent as secret?

THE PRESIDENT. The military.

Q. The military? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT. Military and State.

Q. Mr. President, could you say what is the unit of information? Is it 95 percent of the facts, or 95 percent of the documents or maps? How is the 95 percent figure arrived at?

THE PRESIDENT. It takes into consideration all the things you mentioned.

Q. Mr. President, I am a little confused. Was that the Yale survey—

THE PRESIDENT. That's right.

Q. —that you are thinking about, that

<sup>5</sup> Raymond P. Brandt of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

said that 95 percent of the secret information has been revealed?

THE PRESIDENT. That's correct.

Q. Mr. President, I would like to raise a case in point and get your reaction to it. Yesterday, Mr. Short announced on your behalf, another atomic bomb had been exploded.<sup>6</sup>

THE PRESIDENT. That's right.

Q. —and said that further details would not be given, because it would adversely affect our national security. Right after that, the Associated Press came through with a story quoting an unidentified, authoritative source as saying that there had been two explosions, one of them a fizzle, and then quoting still later a Congressman—also unidentified—as saying that the explosions had taken place in the last 3 or 4 days. Now, would you give me some reaction to that, as a specific example of information over and above that which was released by the White House?

THE PRESIDENT. I think that is an example.

Q. What was that, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT. I said I think that is an example.

Q. Of what, sir?

THE PRESIDENT. Of disclosing information that should not be disclosed.

Q. Well, Mr. President, don't you think the Russians knew it? I mean—

THE PRESIDENT. They exploded it. Of course they knew it! [Laughter]

Q. Yes, sir, so why would it hurt our national defense?

THE PRESIDENT. Because we have got to find out what they are doing, so we will know what to do.

Q. I didn't get the last part? Disclosure of our means of detecting—

THE PRESIDENT. That's right—that's right.

<sup>6</sup> See Item 246.

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That's right—that is exactly right.

Q. Mr. President, how far did this Yale survey figure in the decision to put out this order?

THE PRESIDENT. I didn't sign the order until I got it.

Q. Mr. President, some of this information comes out from Congress. Now the Executive order doesn't apply to that. What about the responsibility of the publisher on information released by Congressmen?

THE PRESIDENT. I can't answer that.

Q. Mr. President, this may be—I may be simple-minded about this—

THE PRESIDENT. No, you're not, Smitty.<sup>7</sup>

Q. —but how did Yale know? [Laughter]

THE PRESIDENT. They made the survey.

Q. Instead of Princeton and Harvard?

Q. How did they get all this secret information?

THE PRESIDENT. They made a survey and supplied it to Central Intelligence. That is how it came about.

Q. I just wonder what Yale was doing with that information?

THE PRESIDENT. They got it out of the newspapers and magazines and sent it down here, and Central Intelligence came to the conclusion that they knew that 95 percent of it was disclosed.

Q. Mr. President, did the CIA recognize and agree with the Yale survey that 95 percent—

THE PRESIDENT. Yes. Yes.

Q. They agreed with it?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes. They made the report to me.

Q. The CIA reported to you?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes.

Q. Mr. President, recently the Defense Department gave out certain information about the Matador, also on these guided

<sup>7</sup>Merriman Smith of the United Press Associations.

missiles, and so forth. That was published probably in every paper in the land. Was that the publishers' responsibility not to publish that?

THE PRESIDENT. I think so, if they want to protect the country.

Q. Wouldn't it be better to tighten up over at Defense?

THE PRESIDENT. That is what we are doing. I say, that is what we are doing, and that is what you are fussing about.

Q. Do you think publishers—if the publishers wanted to protect the country, they shouldn't have printed the pictures—

THE PRESIDENT. They ought to think about the welfare of the country, just the same as I do, and I think most of them would, if they would stop and think about it.

Q. Mr. President, I don't want to defend editors, but—

THE PRESIDENT. It's all right with me.

Q. —these maps were used as part of the civilian defense program, to make the people alert to the dangers of atomic bombs.

THE PRESIDENT. I agree, but then I don't think that it should have been made available to the Russians.

Q. Mr. President, do I understand that you are inferring that there was no A-bomb explosion in Russia that fizzled?

THE PRESIDENT. I am making no inferences at all. I made the announcement yesterday, the only one that I can make.

Q. Mr. President, I would like to ask a question that I think maybe my editors are going to ask me if I don't ask you.

THE PRESIDENT. All right.

Q. Are you suggesting that perhaps—that the editors and publishers that we supply our news stories to, should ask some agency in the Government—

THE PRESIDENT. No, I am not.

Q. —whether a thing should be published or not?

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THE PRESIDENT. No, I am not. I am asking the editors and the publishers to take the same viewpoint of the safety of the United States that I take, and I am not asking them to ask anybody to help them do it. They ought to know.

Q. I know that many times we receive statements from Members of Congress, for instance, and we go ahead and write stories about those statements. Perhaps many times a reporter feels that that information might be of a security nature, but if it is on the record up there on the Hill, there is nothing we can really do except to go ahead and put it out.

THE PRESIDENT. That is up to you. The safety of the country is in your hands just the same as it is in mine.

Q. Mr. President, do you think everyone in Washington talks too much?

THE PRESIDENT. I wouldn't say that.

[2.] Q. Mr. President, I have a—if I may inject a political question which—we were down in the Governors' Conference, and Jimmy Byrnes<sup>8</sup> seems to have had some information that you were not going to run again, the burden of the office is too much, and that the two-term constitutional amendment really shows that the people apply it to you, and in case you do run—I mean, he will oppose you; and his own candidates are Senator Russell of Georgia and Senator Byrd of Virginia?

THE PRESIDENT. Jim didn't get his information from me.

Q. What's that?

THE PRESIDENT. I said Jim didn't get his information from me.

Q. Do you think he is on the—do you think he has made a fair appraisal—

THE PRESIDENT. I have no comment on that.

Q. What's your comment on his candidates, sir?

<sup>8</sup> James F. Byrnes, Governor of South Carolina.

THE PRESIDENT. No comment.

Q. Do you think they would be good men for the Presidency, sir?

THE PRESIDENT. No comment.

[3.] Q. Mr. President, in your—of the—of your written statement, parenthetically you said, as I got it, that the Yale survey found that 95 percent of military information had been made public?

THE PRESIDENT. Of our secret information. That covers everything.

Q. Had been made public?

THE PRESIDENT. Not just military, but State and everything—that's right.

[4.] Q. Mr. President, there has been a controversy recently about the removal of crosses from 13,000 graves in Hawaii, and Mrs. Rogers of Massachusetts has introduced a bill to force the Army to restore those crosses to the graves. I wonder if you have been consulted, or what you think about it?

THE PRESIDENT. No, I haven't. I haven't. I know nothing about it.<sup>9</sup>

[5.] Q. Mr. President, could I ask one practical question? What will happen to a reporter who prints something the Government doesn't want printed?

THE PRESIDENT. Nothing. We have had him print things that would cause our men to be shot in the back, and nothing was done to them, right in the middle of the war.

[6.] Q. Mr. President, could you give us some information about this White House conference, concerning which Mr. Stassen testified on the Hill, dealing with aid to China?<sup>10</sup> There seems to be a little confusion—

<sup>9</sup> See Item 251 [8].

<sup>10</sup> On October 1 Harold E. Stassen, president of the University of Pennsylvania, stated before the Subcommittee on Internal Security of the Senate Judiciary Committee that a White House conference had been held in October 1949 during which the proposal had been made to withdraw all aid from Chiang Kai-shek's government in China. See also Item 251 [25].